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## **CELL BIOLOGISTS OPPOSE REMOVAL OF TOP SCIENTIST**

### **Bush Fires Blackburn in Friday Afternoon Massacre**

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**Bethesda, Md.** - The American Society for Cell Biology, a nonprofit organization representing over 11,000 basic biomedical researchers in the United States and 45 other countries, objects to the decision by President Bush to remove world-renowned biologist Elizabeth Blackburn from his Presidential Bioethics Council.

Distinguished cell biologist Elizabeth Blackburn of the University of California, San Francisco, who served as ASCB President in 1998, was terminated from service on the Council with a late Friday afternoon call from the White House.

"In his 2001 speech announcing the creation of the Council, President Bush said the Council would include strong representation from leading scientists. This action significantly undermines the ability of Councilors to base their considerations on the foundation of sound science. Even before Dr. Blackburn's dismissal, scientists were heavily outnumbered by nonscientists with strong anti-research ideological views. Now it will be even more unlikely than before that the Council will be able to make informed ethical decisions," said ASCB Public Policy Chair Larry Goldstein.

Blackburn had been outspoken in her insistence that the Council consider the moral cost of forgoing potentially lifesaving research, and was frequently at odds with the Council Chairman, Leon Kass.

Blackburn said that, "it was only with the initial strong, personal assurances of the Council Chairman, and of the President of the United States himself, that I was persuaded that the voice of science would be heard and integrated into the statements of the Council. I felt, and continue to feel, that bioethical issues are important to all biologists and worthy of engaging debate and discussion."

Blackburn says it is, "a matter of deep concern to me that reports of the Council fail to live up to the standards of scientifically defensible and intellectually balanced documents, despite the dedicated attempts of myself and others on the Council to make them so."

She adds that she is, "heartened only by the fact that some members of the Council have maintained open minds during our many hours of deliberation. Although these members may not have always agreed with the scientist-members, they were willing to distinguish between science and religion, and to recognize when facts and motivations were being misconstrued in order to substantiate a predetermined point of view."

The timing of the dismissal has become standard operating procedure for this Administration, which regularly takes controversial action on Friday afternoons, when it is most likely to fall into a weekend news void.

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